

Educating Your Community About **Cataract**



Tips and Tools for
Making Vision a Health Priority



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Institutes of Health
National Eye Institute



Educating Your Community About Cataract

Tips and Tools for Making Vision a Health Priority

This Handbook is for people who want to help promote eye health education in their communities. It contains:

- Facts about cataract
- Activity suggestions
- Promotional materials
- Reproducible brochure.

This Handbook is part of the Healthy Vision 2010 Toolkit. See the inside back cover for more information about the toolkit.

This Handbook is from the National Eye Institute (NEI), the lead agency for Healthy Vision 2010. The NEI conducts and supports research that leads to sight-saving treatment and plays a key role in reducing visual impairment and blindness. The NEI is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Welcome to Healthy Vision 2010

Cataract is a clouding of the naturally clear lens of the eye. Most cataracts are related to aging. More than 20 million Americans aged 40 and older have cataract in one or both eyes. More than half of people aged 80 and older have cataract. By 2020, the estimated number of people with cataract is expected to rise to more than 30 million.

Most cataracts are related to aging. By age 80, more than half of all Americans either have had cataract surgery or have a cataract. Many Americans think that vision loss is just a part of growing older. As a result, people with cataract and the people who care for them do not consider treatment.

Reducing visual impairment due to cataract is an objective of Healthy Vision 2010. Healthy Vision 2010 is one component of Healthy People 2010, a comprehensive framework for improving the health of our Nation, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Through your agency or organization, you may come in contact with people who are at risk for cataract, or their families, friends, or caregivers. You can play an important role in helping to reduce visual impairment from cataract by sharing the messages and materials in this Healthy Vision 2010 Handbook with them.

Some suggestions for using the materials in this Handbook:

- ❖ Cut out, copy, and distribute the brochure, newsletter article, and print public service announcements (PSAs).
- ❖ Include the newsletter article and PSAs in your publications, or on your Intranet or Website.

- ❖ Record the radio PSAs and play them on your audio system, place them on your on-hold line, or provide them to a local radio station.
- ❖ Read the suggestions in the “Help Reduce Visual Impairment Due to Cataract” section to learn other ways that your organization or business can become part of a community-wide effort to reduce visual impairment due to cataract.

Learn how others are helping. Get the most current information and materials and report your activities at www.healthyvision2010.org. This Website is updated regularly.

Thank you for giving your time and talents to the important effort of helping to reduce visual impairment due to cataract. Best wishes for your success.



Help Reduce Visual Impairment Due to Cataract

Cataract is a clouding of the naturally clear lens of the eye. Most cataracts are related to aging. More than 20 million Americans aged 40 and older have cataract in one or both eyes. More than half of people 80 years of age or older have cataract. By 2020, the estimated number of people with cataract is expected to rise to more than 30 million.

Cataract removal is one of the most common operations performed in the United States. It is also one of the safest and most effective types of surgery. In about 90 percent of cases, people who have cataract surgery have better vision afterward.

Use the ideas in this section along with the other materials in this Handbook to conduct activities that will help people in your community who are at risk for cataract understand that treatment for cataract is safe and effective.

The answers to the following questions can guide your plans and activities to promote awareness of the benefits of early detection of cataract, treatment at the appropriate time, and measures to take to reduce the risk of cataract.

Who can benefit from information about cataract?

- ❖ Women (women are almost twice as likely to have cataract than men).
- ❖ Everyone over age 60.

- ❖ People who are at higher risk because of:
 - Certain medical conditions like diabetes
 - Medications for chronic conditions like asthma (steroids)
 - Personal behavior (smoking, alcohol abuse)
 - The environment (prolonged exposure to ultraviolet sunlight)
 - Trauma (eye injury)
 - Obesity
- ❖ Families, friends, coworkers, employers, and caregivers of people who are at risk for cataract.

What does your audience need to know?

If faded or clouded vision is caused by cataract, it can be treated with the most common medical procedure performed in the United States. More than 90 percent of people see better after surgery to replace the clouded lens with a clear artificial lens.

How can people know whether their vision problem is caused by cataract?

An eye care professional can give you a comprehensive dilated eye exam to determine whether cataract or something else is causing your vision problem. This exam includes:

- ❖ Visual acuity test. This eye chart test measures how well you see at various distances.
- ❖ Dilated eye exam. Drops are placed in your eye to dilate (widen) the pupils, the dark part in the center of your eye. Your eye care professional then uses a special magnifying lens to get a closer look at your lens, retina (the light-

sensitive tissue at the back of your eye), and optic nerve (the part of your eye that sends messages to the brain).

- ❖ Tonometry. This is a standard test to measure fluid pressure inside the eye. Drops may be applied to your eye for this test.

Your eye care professional may also do other tests to learn more about the structure and health of your eye.

What can be done in your community to help?

The following are some suggestions of how different groups in your community can support activities to reduce visual impairment due to cataract.

Community health and eye care professionals can take the lead.

- ❖ Take advantage of community events, such as local health fairs, parades, festivals, sports events, and walk-for-health events.
- ❖ Deliver cataract materials to registration desks at outdoor events with a note encouraging people to wear sunglasses and visors.
- ❖ Partner with your state health department to promote the message of good vision and eye health.
- ❖ Team with an organization that is providing giveaways at outdoor events and encourage them to give visors or sunglasses with a message about cataract.
- ❖ Schedule events during Healthy Vision Month in May, Healthy Aging Month in September, and other health observances. Be creative. For example, Skin Cancer Awareness Month is in May. People are encouraged to protect the skin around their eyes and face from the sun with hats and sunglasses to prevent

skin cancer. This protection can also help reduce a person's risk of cataract. Find out whether there is a skin cancer prevention program in your community and work together.

- ❖ Educate pre-school, Headstart, play groups, and parents' groups about the prevention of cataracts and the detrimental effects of the sun and UV rays.
- ❖ Target information to family members, caregivers, and people at risk for cataract. Inform younger family members of the early signs of cataract and encourage them to “keep an eye on your loved one's vision.”
- ❖ Offer to help other groups with their events and activities that reach your target audience in exchange for free space to distribute materials about cataract.
- ❖ Develop a directory of eye care professionals who offer comprehensive dilated eye exams and treatment for cataract. In all your communications, identify the Medicare phone number, 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), where people can get information about coverage for eye exams and cataract treatment.
- ❖ Arrange for eye care professionals, educators, and other health professionals to speak before civic, employee, cultural, faith, and fraternal groups about the importance of cataract detection and treatment for helping older Americans protect their sight.
- ❖ Get to know what motivates and interests your target audience. Distribute materials through information channels that they trust for learning about health issues. Include locations where they live, shop, work, worship, and socialize, as well as traditional resources for health care information. Posters

and flyers can be placed in stores, libraries, pharmacies, restaurants, public transportation vehicles, workplace cafeterias, health centers, social and entertainment venues, and more.

Faith communities can get families involved.

- ❖ Put the article about cataract in this Handbook in your newsletters.
- ❖ Order cataract materials available through the National Eye Institute (NEI) and display them prominently.
- ❖ Place vision messages on a faith center marquee and in weekly faith center bulletins or newsletters.

Community leaders can raise awareness.

- ❖ Ask community leaders who address health concerns for your target audience to include mention of cataract as “a leading cause of low vision among older Americans in public addresses.”
- ❖ Add the cataract PSA, newsletter article, facts about cataract, or brochure in media kits with news releases that outline health concerns for your target audience.
- ❖ Invite an eye health expert to attend a panel discussion events where issues that are of concern to your target audience are addressed.
- ❖ Invite eye care professionals to be guest speakers on your community radio and TV talk shows.
- ❖ Offer to provide quotes for community organizers to use in news releases about activities related to cataract and comprehensive dilated eye exams

Special events can reach target audiences.

- ❖ Women are almost twice as likely as men to develop a cataract. Use cataract promotional materials and brochures at events that draw audiences of women, such as the “Million Mom March” and breast cancer awareness walk-a-thons.
- ❖ Older Americans are at a greater risk for cataract. Use the cataract materials at war memorial dedications, Veteran’s Day ceremonies and parades, and at senior discount days. Coordinate with the Shriners, American Legion, the Elks, and other public service organizations to find out about events they are planning. Ask them to distribute the cataract materials in this Handbook or publish them in their newsletters.
- ❖ Some people are at higher risk for cataract because of medications, health problems, smoking and heavy drinking, or because they spend a lot of time outdoors. Special events such as boat shows, “The Great American Smoke-Out,” and other events can reach these target audiences with messages about the long-term risks and potential benefits of making their vision a health priority.

Employers can support employees and their families.

- ❖ Put messages into people’s hands. Use the PSAs, brochure, and newsletter article as inserts in utility bills, bank statements, and pay envelopes. Post eye health messages on company listserves and Websites, or in newsletters.
- ❖ Offer employees company time to provide transportation for people in your community who are having comprehensive dilated eye exams or cataract surgery.

Businesses can support community-wide efforts.

- ❖ Provide giveaways that community programmers can use as small rewards and symbols of recognition to volunteers and/or participants.

- ❖ Sponsor the placement of the radio public service announcements about cataract on stations that will reach your audience at the times they will be listening.
- ❖ Use the PSAs and ready-to-use cataract article in shopping circulars distributed in stores, by mail, and as newspaper inserts.
- ❖ Print messages on bags, receipts, fast food containers, and disposable containers such as cold and hot cups, and on placemats.
- ❖ Offer to print the materials for free for distribution at events and activities.
- ❖ Include cataract-related activities and information at blood pressure and immunization clinics and health fairs sponsored by a local shopping center, mall, health department, or civic group.
- ❖ Make room for an exhibit, or provide space for a “questions and answers about cataract” session at a table or booth.
- ❖ Provide store coupons or restaurant discounts for eye care professionals to give as rewards to people who receive comprehensive dilated eye exams or cataract surgery.
- ❖ Provide company transportation for people who are receiving comprehensive dilated exams or cataract surgery either in your company or in your community.
- ❖ Join a local organization that provides eye care services for people who are unable to pay for them, and sponsor one or more disadvantaged person’s eye care.
- ❖ Discuss with your employee benefits managers or occupational health nurses how a program on eye health can fit into employee health education or benefits programs.

- ❖ Establish incentives for higher risk employees to have their eyes examined.
- ❖ Distribute cataract information at company-sponsored events such as a golf tournament or company picnic.

By taking steps to encourage people with early symptoms of cataract to visit their eye care professional and get treatment, you are joining thousands of other businesses, employers, health centers, medical professionals, and citizens across the country in the effort to reduce visual impairment due to cataract.

Share in the Success of Healthy Vision 2010

Others can learn from the activities you develop. Report your activities to your local community organizer, and visit the Healthy Vision 2010 Website at www.healthyvision2010.org to share your efforts and successes. Also use the Website to learn what others are doing to help reduce visual impairment due to cataract. Thank you for your efforts.

Some Simple Steps

- ❖ Keep track of the following:
 - Number and type of materials distributed.
 - Number of people participating.
 - Number and type of inquiries received about comprehensive dilated eye exams for early detection of cataract.
 - Increase in the number of comprehensive dilated eye exams among people at higher risk in your community.
 - Media coverage: Where the newsletter or stories about your event appeared.
- ❖ After the activity or event, answer the following questions:
 - What worked?
 - What challenges did you encounter?
 - What suggestions would you give to others who might plan a similar activity or event?



Facts About Cataract

Cataract is a clouding of the naturally clear lens of the eye. More than 20 million Americans aged 40 and older have cataract in one or both eyes. By age 80, more than half of all Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery. These numbers, together with the growing population of older Americans, make cataract one of the most common and successful operations performed in the United States.

What is cataract?

Cataract occurs when the lens of the eye becomes cloudy, eventually interfering with vision.

Who needs to know about cataract?

While the risk of cataract increases as you get older, other risk factors include:

- ❖ Certain medical conditions like diabetes
- ❖ Medications for chronic conditions like asthma (steroids)
- ❖ Personal behavior (such as smoking or alcohol abuse)
- ❖ Environment (such as prolonged exposure to ultraviolet sunlight)
- ❖ Trauma (eye injury)
- ❖ Obesity.

What are the symptoms of cataract?

The most common symptoms of cataract are:

- ❖ Cloudy or faded vision.
- ❖ Colors that seem faded.
- ❖ Glare. Headlights, lamps, or sunlight may appear too bright, and a halo may appear around lights.
- ❖ Poor night vision.
- ❖ Double vision or multiple vision in one eye. (This symptom may clear as the cataract gets larger).
- ❖ Frequent prescription changes in your eyeglasses or contact lenses.

Some of these symptoms may be a sign of other eye problems. If you have any of these symptoms, check with your eye care professional.

How is cataract detected?

A comprehensive dilated eye exam can determine whether cataract or another eye problem causes your vision problem. This exam includes:

- ❖ Visual acuity test. This eye chart test measures how well you see at various distances.

- ❖ Dilated eye exam. Drops are placed in your eye to dilate (widen) the pupils, the dark part in the center of your eye. Your eye care professional uses a special magnifying lens to get a closer look at your retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of your eye), and optic nerve (the part of your eye that sends messages to the brain).
- ❖ Tonometry. This is a standard test to measure fluid pressure inside the eye. Drops may be applied to your eye for this test.

Your eye care professional may also do other tests to learn more about the structure and health of your eye.

How is cataract treated?

In the early stages, using glasses, magnifying lenses, or stronger lighting may improve vision. A cataract needs to be removed and replaced with an artificial lens when it causes vision loss that interferes with your everyday activities, such as driving, reading, or watching TV. Your eye care professional may also recommend removing a cataract if it prevents examination or treatment of another eye problem, such as age-related macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy.

Is cataract surgery safe and effective?

Cataract removal is one of the most common operations performed in the United States. It is also one of the safest and most effective types of surgery. In about 90 percent of cases, people who have cataract surgery have better vision afterward.

What keeps people from getting cataract surgery?

Many people think that losing vision is a normal part of growing older. They do not know there is safe, effective treatment that may help them see more clearly.

What can people do in your community to protect their vision from cataract?

- ❖ Have regular comprehensive dilated eye exams the older one gets. People over age 60 should have one at least every two years.
- ❖ Wear sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection and a head covering with a visor, even in winter, to protect eyes from ultraviolet sunlight.
- ❖ Follow a doctor's recommended regimen if a medical condition is present that puts one at higher risk for cataract.
- ❖ Avoid personal behaviors that can increase risk for cataract, such as smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages in excess.



Here is an article that you can put in your company or organization newsletter or post on your company bulletin board or Intranet.

Is Cataract Causing Your Cloudy or Fading Vision?

Cataract is the leading cause of low vision among Americans in general, and a leading cause of blindness among African Americans. Fortunately, cataract removal is one of the most common operations performed in the United States. It is also one of the safest and most effective types of surgery. In about 90 percent of cases, people who have cataract surgery have better vision afterward.

Most cataracts are related to aging. More than 17 percent of Americans aged 40 and older have cataract or have had cataract in the past. More than 20 million Americans aged 40 and older have cataract in one or both eyes. By 2020, the estimated number of people with cataract is expected to rise to more than 30 million. More than half of all Americans aged 80 and older have cataract. Risk factors for cataract include obesity, cigarette smoking, exposure to ultraviolet light, and alcohol consumption.

Cataract forms when the normally clear lens in one or both eyes becomes cloudy and prevents light from passing through to the retina. For most people, the first noticeable signs of cataract may include cloudy vision, glaring or abnormally high sensitivity to bright light, poor night vision, faded color vision, double or multiple vision in one eye, or frequent changes in prescriptions for eyeglasses or contact lenses. A comprehensive dilated eye examination by an eye care professional can determine whether a cataract or some other problem is causing loss of vision.

Replacing the clouded lens with a clear one is called for when cataract interferes with everyday activities, such as driving a car, reading, or watching TV. This surgery is performed nearly 3 million times a year in the United States, making it the most common surgical procedure today. And it is estimated that the Federal government spends more than \$3.4 billion each year for cataract treatment through the Medicare program.

For more information on cataract, visit the Healthy Vision 2010 Website at www.healthyvision2010.org, sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the Healthy Vision Consortium.

The NEI conducts and supports research that leads to sight-saving treatment and plays a key role in reducing visual impairment and blindness. The NEI is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Radio Public Service Announcements

Cataract

Radio PSA: 30-second spot

“Make vision a health priority. Cataract.”

Station announcer:

Is your vision cloudy or faded? Do headlights seem too bright at night?

You could be one of more than 20 million Americans aged 40 and older who have cataract. Smoking, diabetes, or excessive exposure to sunlight can put you at higher risk.

More than 90 percent of people who have cataract see better after having the clouded lens replaced with a clear one. It's safe, effective, and relatively fast.

Ask your eye care professional if cataract or some other problem is causing your vision loss.

A message from [insert the name of the sponsoring organization].

Cataract

Radio PSA: 15-second spot

“Make vision a health priority. Cataract.”

Station announcer:

Are you aged 40 and older? Is your vision cloudy or faded? Do headlights seem too bright at night?

Ask your eye care professional if you have cataract.

More than 90 percent of people who have cataract see better after treatment.

A message from [insert the name of the sponsoring organization].

Print Public Service Announcement

**Is your vision
cloudy or faded?
Do headlights seem
too bright at night?**

**You could have
cataract.**



**More than 20 million
Americans aged 40 and
older have cataract.**

**Make vision a health
priority. Know your risk.
Get a comprehensive
dilated eye exam.**



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AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Add your logo and copy this brochure to hand out at your events, or add an address on the back and mail it out.



For more information about cataract,
visit the Healthy Vision Website at
www.healthylvision2010.org/.

Is Cataract Causing Your Clouded Vision?

Do you have cataract?

Cataract forms when the normally clear lens in one or both eyes becomes cloudy and prevents you from seeing clearly.

For most people, the first signs include clouded vision, glaring or sensitivity to bright light, poor night vision, faded color vision, double or multiple vision in one eye, or frequent changes in prescriptions for eyeglasses or contact lenses. Your eye care professional can examine your eyes to tell whether your vision loss is from cataract or another vision problem.



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Who can get cataract?

Most cataracts are related to aging. More than 17 percent of Americans aged 40 and older have cataract in one or both eyes. More than half of all Americans aged 80 and older have cataract. Smoking, trauma (accidents), too much sun, and diabetes can also lead to cataract.

Can cataract be treated?

At first when you have cataract, stronger glasses, magnifying lenses, or stronger lighting may help. When cataract interferes with your everyday activities such as reading, driving, or watching TV, you may need surgery to replace the clouded lens with a clear one.

Is cataract surgery safe and effective?

Cataract removal is one of the most common, safe, and effective operations performed in the United States. In about 90 percent of cases, people who have cataract surgery have better vision afterward.

What can I do to protect my vision from cataract?

Older people get more cataracts, but the causes often are not known. However, wearing sunglasses and visors outdoors, not smoking, drinking in moderation, and following your doctor's orders to take care of your diabetes and other health conditions may reduce your chances of getting cataract.

Healthy Vision 2010 Toolkit

The Healthy Vision 2010 Toolkit is an interactive CD-ROM that includes Handbooks, the Community Action Guide, and the Speaker's Guide. These resources also are available on the Web at www.healthyvision2010.org/, and are targeted to those who want to make vision a health priority in their communities.

- **The Handbooks** each focus on a different Healthy Vision 2010 objective. They include community-based activity suggestions, newspaper/newsletter articles, public service announcements, and brochures to copy and to hand out.
- **The Community Action Guide** includes a planning timeline, media materials, tips for involving your community, and more.
- **The Speaker's Guide** contains presentations to engage and inform communities about eye health. PowerPoint, Word, and Acrobat versions of each presentation, along with speaker's notes, are included. Topics include injury and safety, eye disease, vision rehabilitation, and others.

Healthy Vision 2010 Objectives

Healthy People 2010, the prevention framework of the Nation, challenges individuals, communities, and professionals to take specific steps to ensure that good health and long life are enjoyed by all. Healthy Vision 2010 refers to the vision objectives in Focus Area 28 of Healthy People 2010.

Following are the 10 vision objectives:

- 28-1 Increase the proportion of persons who have a dilated eye examination at appropriate intervals.
- 28-2 Increase the proportion of preschool children aged 5 years and under who receive vision screening.
- 28-3 Reduce uncorrected visual impairment due to refractive errors.
- 28-4 Reduce blindness and visual impairment in children and adolescents aged 17 years and under.
- 28-5 Reduce visual impairment due to diabetic retinopathy.
- 28-6 Reduce visual impairment due to glaucoma.
- 28-7 Reduce visual impairment due to cataract.
- 28-8 Reduce occupational eye injury.
- 28-9 Increase the use of appropriate personal protective eyewear in recreational activities and hazardous situations around the home.
- 28-10 Increase vision rehabilitation.
 - 28-10a Increase the use of rehabilitation services by persons with visual impairments.
 - 28-10b Increase the use of visual and adaptive devices by persons with visual impairments.

For copies and information, please visit www.healthyvision2010.org.

